

The devolution of power from Istakhar to Shiz in the Sassanid period

Mehrnaz Behroozi

Fatemeh Sadat Jamshidi

¹ Assistant Professor of History, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch

Mehrnaz_Behroozi@yahoo.com

¹ Ph.D. student of History, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch

Anahitajamshidi@yahoo.com

Abstract

Istakhar is one of the most important cities in the Sasanid period and it had a particular position in Zoroastrianism. With the coming of Ardashir Sasanid (224-241 M), Istakhar gained more power and holiness, and it changed to an influential fire temple where all religious ceremonies and governmental rules were implemented in this fire temple. But since Shapur II, the power was devolved to Shiz. After this devolution, the power of Shiz reached to such an extent that even the Avesta was rewritten in this fire temple, and this power remained until the end of the Sassanian period. Even after the Arab invasion of Iran, an agreement was reached to have this fire temple and keep it safe. In this research, by using a descriptive and analytical method, attempts are made to investigate the method of transferring power from Istakhar to Shiz, and also analyze the reason of it.

Key words: Istakhar, Shiz, Sassanian, Fire temple.

Introduction

Many authorities have been paid attention to these two cities “Istakhar and Shiz” that has been helpful in advancing this study.

When you take a quick look at the history of Sassanian Empire, we see Istakhar as the beginning of this empire.

Istakhar was considered one the most important cities of ancient Iran especially the most important centers of the Sassanid.

Investigating the influence of the kings and clerics, to consider the extent of the effect of devoting the power from Istakhar to Shiz is something carried out in this study.

The first step to study how the power devoted from Istakhar to Shiz may have to be identified with the coins.

The way of writing and the subjects on the coins of the first Sassanid period differs from the second one, and the items mentioned and the titles of the kings shows the religious and worldly power of Sassanid empires, but these writings, in the second Sassanid period, have led us to the point when the religious leadership was taken from the Sasanian kings.

About the emergence of Istakhar city, the construction of the city has been attributed to Ardavan Shah Partian. It has written in the letter of Tansar that Alexander burnt Dadsetan-I Denig book in Istakhar written on 12000 oxhides and a third of it remained in their hearts. Fars found a special position as an origin of Sassanid Empire at least in the first century of this empire. Istakhar became a traditional and family base for the kings of this dynasty. However, isolation of Fars and being far away from imperial strategic areas, were also forced the goddess of Mazda worshipers to be deported and resided in imperial western regions . It seems that in Sassanid period, Istakhar had a situation similar to Persepolis in Achaemenid Empire. Just like Hamadan, Babol, and Shush that were more important than Persepolis in terms of administration in Achaemenid Empire. Although Istakhar was more important than other capitals of Sassanid like Nishapur and Tisfon in terms of managing, but because it was the origin of Sassanid, Its symbolic significance was preserved until the end of the Sassanid period. But the state of Pars and its capital did not deserve the king's residence. As part of the historic events of Mesopotamia, the center of the Imperial Palace was established, and Seleucia and Ctesiphon inherited the political role of the Old Believers. The great Maghreb government of Rome was almost behind the gates of the Iranian capital .

In the geography of ancient Yashts that much has been said about them so far, all has been located in the east of Iran around Rangeh River and Voro Kasha Lake, and there is no mention to the west of Iran at all. Whenever some people bring references to the west, they must be considered to be distorted by Zoroastrians in the west of Iran. In fact, by a lot of distortions in Avesta, it must be said that Zoroastrians in the west of Iran brought such a disaster to the history and geography of the Oriental Zoroastrians that a lot of unspeakable ambiguities have been grown out of it. It is from the time when Zoroastrianism was brought to Ray . A lot of myths were created about the construction of Azerbaijan. Its construction is attributed to Azerbaijani Lieutenant Colonel “Iran Goshnasp” In Mojmal al-tawarikh is written that the cave where Afrasiab took refuge in, is near Jis or Shiz of the famous county of ancient Azerbaijan .(Dinh Kard, Book 9, Chapter 23, Clause 5, and Chapter B, Chapter 17, Item 7). Furthermore, one of the important point in the study of Kay Khosrow is to destroy Bahman Dezh in Ardabil and replace Azar Goshansp, as it is quoted from pieces of Pahlavi texts, Kay Khosrow destroyed a temple next to the Chichest Lake and construct Azar Goshasp instead(Goshnasp). Kay Khosrow killed a dragon with the name of Kooshid, and where he ruined this dragon, a famous temple with the name of Azar kooshid was made. The name Kooshid can be considered a distortion of Goshnasp (Goshnsp). Making all texts of Avesta unique to their land by Moghan, namely North Maad , was another evolution like determining an artificial history that caused Zoroastrianism to be under the shadow of ambiguities for other researchers.

So much that the name of the people and their places and the event in the north eastern of Iran found a new connection to north west, Iranowich changed to the territory of Azerbaijan, and tried to find out the center of Ariyan and Yucca polices around Azerbaijan. The sacred river Daia-Tia became a river which flowed from eastern of ancient Asian and entered the Mazandaran Sea (Caspian Sea), It means that Aras or Arkses in ancient writings and Yoro kasha became Sea of Mazandaran. The Caicita Lake became Lake of Oromia. Harabarezaiti mountain which son rises from it became the mountain ranges at south of Mazandaran Sea , that name is kept as Alborz. Zartosht (Zoroaster) was born in Shiz at the Oromia Lake site, His father was also from there. But the Ray as a worthwhile center must have a share too. So, mother of the prophet became from Ray Hamxeh Esfahani writes in the thirtieth year of the Reign of Kay Goshtasp that was his 15th birth year too. Zartosht came to him from Azerbaijan and revealed his religion. These are all many memorials from the cultural competitive center with the vain games of the Magi schools with Avestan names, and games that may have hidden political accounts behind them for more discipline and regulations.

We conclude from these that all western narratives about determining Zoroastrian points in the east are historically worthless. Zoroaster was born in west of Iran and went to the east to publish of his religion, and became from Manouchehr seed. Romans say that Zoroaster was from Mosul and by using this word (Mosul), they meant from the limits of Azerbaijan to Mosul. Zoroaster learned his ideas from Philocos, and he went to the Sbalan Mountains after the death of Philocos and few years stayed there and completed the Avesta. Other story in Azerbaijan is about the Jamshid that when he was entering to Azerbaijan, sat on a golden stretcher on the shoulders of the people, when son raise laid down on it and people saw it. They celebrated that day and consider it as an Eid. Other story backs to how the Avesta was written, when Alexander Macedonian over come to Iran, he burned the Nobeshtak fortress. So, the Avesta also burned with the number of other books. Nobeshtak caster or the king's great library was one the royal palaces of Persepolis. In the year 331ad, this library also destroyed in the fire of Persepolis. The other version was kept in Shibia's (Shibigan) library in Shiz close to Oromia in Azerbaijan next to the Azar Goshnasb fire temple. It is quoted from "Cent" that the version of Avesta has been reserved in Azerbaijan in Shiz in Azar Goshnasb fire temple.

We see prominent examples of these distortions that how Iranian magi in west transferred the name of the places of Avesta clan and their names to the Azerbaijan at northwest of Iran so that it made researchers to be astonished for a long time at the actual location of this places. Because of some happenings magi urgently accepted Zoroastrian religion formally, because this religion was expanded in Ray. Political forces were transferred from east of Iran to the west. The magi materialism suddenly changed the sacred history from the easternmost point to the north westernmost of Iran. It means "from Marv and Jayhoun to Maad". Taking to account the central situation of magi materialism by adding political demands to that, the result not be more than one thing: All the ancient Zoroastrian history was transferred to the Maad and North West of Iran. It means "Azerbaijan" or "ancient Atropatkan", the place that was the main land of magi around Lake of Uremia, and through this way all those misguides raised, that caused irregularities and disorder to the Iran's history for a long time. Zarathustra's birthplace "Aerianem Vaedje" became "Atropathen". Three seeds Ray, the best land which is Azerbaijan was created, that's why its called three seeds that Aaeron, Arteshtar and Astrioush of there is better and its Rapatyare is worse, its so understood that it is on the will of the goddess. They are suspicious themselves, so make others suspicious toos. But about considering Ray and Raghe the same place, Nioly believes that Raghe is just the Azarbaijan which mistakenly call it Ray.

The Zoroastrian clergy organizations was expanding and flourishing and probably it seems it has been this period of time to compete with “ Barzin Mehr “ magnificent fire, attention had been paid to the two sacred fires in Pars and Maad, fire party (by tying its story to the prophet Vishtasb) it had been so sacred that western clerics could not deny respecting it, But now they classified at a lower level of their fires, and they claim that Azarfranbagh (which was burning in Pars) is the specific fire for clerics and Azar gogoshnasb (in Maad) is a fire for the warriors , while “Azar Barzin Mehr” belongs to low layers of the community such as farmers and ranchers . This plan had merely been a schematic plan, but it seems that it has provided the basis for a dramatic advancement of both west fires. The religious attitude of this also important. At their time the great priest “Kertir” formed the official community of Zoroastrian clergy and tried to formulate a set of rules. Avesta was sanctified by him, created official religion, unified the system of belief, created the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy in conjunction with government. Vicander believes that the worship center of the priest of magi was in Shiz in Azerbaijan, while “Hirbod” had been deployed in Fars in the south of Iran with Istakhar centrality. Fray says it is not far from mind that they had written some trimming on Khosrow events like the description of the Kay Khosrow life. Some scientists attributed the rising of the greatest imperial basis that who is Mobed of Mobeds (priest of priest) to Rozar Khosrow’s works. But attributing all the initiatives to his reign period may be overwhelming. This saying could be possible that Khosrow classified ratings of the fire temples which Azar Goshnasb is also one of them, and chose the Shiz or Gznak a place for coronation, but there are not valid reasons to prove that any way. In the sources of those period of time, about material fire ,that’s mean Azar Goshnap, it speaks more. Partially, because among these three fires it was the closest to western borders of Iran, so, it was the attention of the foreign visitors, and partially because kings were also in warrior’s category. So, they could had upgraded this fire to royal fire. There is no mention to this issue in the early Sassanid period inscriptions and archeological exploration also shows which in the late of forth century or in early fifth century this fire had moved to very beautiful place in Azerbaijan. This place reputed as Takht-E Soleyman in the Islamic era, is a hill which at the flat top of it, there is a lake which is higher than surrounding villages. This situation has made this place suitable to present Zoroastrian meditation to God and his creations “Water and fire”. Two rooms were made at the center of fire temple on its square surface map, its internal space was chiasma, which the altar is at its center. In the smaller room the eternal fire was kept, that the clerics living there always took care of it. From there, fire was brought to a bigger room for religious ceremonies. The reason for choosing this place as a fire temple complex is a lake which its

origination is 60 meters lower than the lake level. Azar Goshnasp was surrounded by a four meters thick wall consisting of thirty eight towers and entrance gate. But the connection of royal family "warrior's fire" was successfully accepted, and it became customary for each king to go on pilgrimage. After the coronation by walk (probably from the sacred Hillside). The same as Patrian family who they were donating many gifts to Azar Barzin Mehr, Sassanid were also presenting to Azar Goshnasp, and the first king who his name was mentioned about this is the fifth Bahram and probably that was him which faithful and passionate fully accepted connection of royal family with this holy fire. The most impressive for vaulted building is Azar Goshnasp in the north of Iran. This is the widest religious site of Sassanid era which testifies the importance of fire in the Zoroastrian. This fire temple belongs to Sassanid late era that is about 6 century AD, which built by Khosrow second (590-628 AD) at the north of Maad lands. This was one of the three important fire temples from Sassanid era which belongs to Artesh Taran.

Goshnasp was a fire for kings and warriors and its symbolic is a male and stylish hours. It has been said that its compound meaning is a fire jumper because Azar means fire and Goshnasp means jumper and this meaning has a close relationship with electricity. In Pahlavi, Goshnasp is compounded of Artur meaning Azar and Goshnasp compounded of Golshansp meaning male or masculine and horse meaning Pegasus, therefore this compound word means a fire of male horse, and as it has come in other arguments or cultures, it does not mean a jumper fire. Others have called Shiz Gazanak or Goniak meaning treasure or treasure house a summer base for Khosrow Parviz, near and around Lake Urmia in the way of Maragheh to Tabriz, near Leylan. In a war between Khosrow Parviz and Heraclius, Ganjak was opened up by the Romans and its treasure was plundered. It is also said that when Khosrow Parviz was leaving Ganjak, he took the treasure with himself in order to not fall into the hands of the enemy. Because of this treasure, the name of Ganjak added to Shiz. Therefore, they considered the place of the fire temple of Azar Goshtasp in Shiz or Ganjak. It is said that, there was a fountain of oil near it that the fire temple was fired by it. There are other opinions on this name that Heraclius first conquered Armenia and then the region of Kanzak was captured by him in Caucasus. In the year 623 AD, Heraclius invaded Azerbaijan and ruined the big famous Azar Goshtasp fire temple. During the reign of Soviet, many of ancient names were disappeared, including the famous city of Kazanak or Ganjeh and Barda city called Mir Bashir Qasim which was the name of the president of that country. According to Klaus Shipman's sayings, as has often been claimed, it differs from Shiz or in other words Takht-e Soleyman. Some travelers had visited the fire temple and wrote about it, including Mesar

Ebn-Mahmal who had been living in the Sassanid court in the middle 4th AD and had a travelogue missed. According to him, in past, Azar Goshnasp was a very holy place and a shrine in the Sassanid era for either general or special people and even after overthrow of the Arabs and several years after, it had been raised and paid attention. It has also been included in Bundahshn that Azar Goshnasp was always the supporter of the world until the kingdom of Kay Khosrow. Masoudi has quoted from Mesar that astounding works and drawings on this fire temple is still remained, including the picture of constellations and stars, the landscape map of seas, lands, villages, and the picture of plants and animals. According to Mesar's sayings, fire temples of Zoroastrians were fired from this this fire place that a crescent of silver had been installed on the top of its dome that was significant for talisman. According to Mesar, the construction of this fire temple was 700 years old. According to Mesar's writings which is interesting here is that, this fire temple is flaming nonstop for 700 years without remaining ashes.

They say that the king Hormoz built the city of stone and relics, set up this fire temple and a tall and magnificent mansion around it. Maragheh residents called this place Gazan, Ebne-Khorda Beh (200AH) writes this fire temple respected by Zoroastrians and was customary for the kings to go there on foot. For pilgrimage after the coronation. Considering that Azar Goshnasp was the fire for the king, aside from the ordinary people's vows, precious gifts were donated to the temples by the kings that gradually tremendous wealth had been collected there, so much that it was named Ganjak. In the Sassanid era, the city of Shiz has been very important. There was a way from Madayen or Tisfon to Shiz and the city of Zour has been placed along this way as its half, So they were calling it "Half Of Way", putting the name half of way on the Zour city states importance of this road between the Sassanid capital and Shiz as much as Shiz was. Yaghoot says Maragheh residents knew the city of Shiz as Gazana, greek writers say "Gaz" or "Gazana" was one the two capital cities of ancient Azerbaijan. Islamic authors have also noted the importance of the Shiz in Parthians and Sassanid times. Mosoudi Said Shiz has been capital of Sassanid and Parthians for their summer times, and the famous fire temple Azar Goshnasp(Azarjashnas was edited to Azarakhsh) has been in this city. This fire temple has been the Sassanid kings most important symbol, and also was a symbol of the Sassanid warriors and temples (After Bahram they were always in deal with it).

In the Sassanid Kingdome that Zoroastrian was the official religion, there was a variety of religious ceremonies. Probably, the situation had been different state to state, and the border provinces of the empire had been more affected by their adjacent regions than central regions

of Iran which were under the influence of the Zoroastrian clerics . According to Widengern thought, after the middle of the third century, a combination of two groups took place which eventually religion of the Sassanid government had come out of it . Sassanid was the first ancient Iranian dynasty in Pars which they had religious and political power in their hands simultaneously. Shiz fire temple was the sign of unity between government and religion, and was the symbol of Sassanid government, which was strengthened due to unity with faith, something that they could not get in Pars. Ardeshir had a magnificent role in developing of the Sassanid attitude and ideology or imperial monarchy. The inscription of Ardeshir era shows, he believed or wished the people believe that the God has appointed him to rule the land of Iran. In the Pahlavi sources related to the Zoroastrian tradition, this opinion had been raised that the path of Zoroastrian religion is unique, and there is an unbreakable bond between government and religion. Being entertained with political affairs until Bharam 1th caused to reduce Sassanid religious power.

The Zoroastrian religion was never homogenous in the Sassanid period, while Sassanid government and the clergy and Pahlavi sources applied their all attempts in showing such a unity, but written sources and early Islamic documents are against it. There have been two types of Zoroastrianism. It was said for a while that Zoroastrianism had been the dominated thoughts among the priests and kings of Sassanid era. Based on a work book which Shapoor 1th has left on the Zarathustra's Kaaba (many times are reminded that it is one of the holy places from early Sassanid era). Also gave us some information about his religious beliefs and his originality .Shapoor had used the words "Sassan the god", though at the middle Persian language, God means rector or leader in its diplomatic meaning, but there are some examples that this attribute had been added to the name Urmazad, so it has conceptual meaning . For Zoroastrianism to be able to stay against Manichaeism and Christianity who claimed to have a world view, it was necessary that its organization and ceremonies were more solid and their facilities could have been more expanded. So during to Shapoor 4th period, major works was done in that way: first- until that time, the Avesta and Zoroastrian religious texts were oral and was though from father to son through the priests. So, Shpoo ordered a large association of the greatest and most wise priests to come together and criticize all religious matters, discuss to other faith believers and provide the official Avesta texts. Second: for the life and in order to write the Avesta correctly it was necessary to invent a font, the Avestan Alphabet which is the most beautiful and perfect alphabet that we know. The third job which was done were administrating, legalizing and determining financial levels of the religious care takers, from there after we see titles like great Mobed or great of

Mobeds which in fact turned out to Mobed of Mobeds. It is from there after that the big fire temples of the country like Azar Franbagh, Azar Barzin mehr, and Azar Goshnasp in Shiz of Azerbaijan gained special importance, any state had a great Mobed, a Mobed for each city and a Hirbod for any fire temple....The fourth important job was editing national and traditional Iranian history and the Avestan history became the old official Iranian history, and then those things in the “ God’s letter” or official history of Iran that had been collected at the time of Anoshiravan found the way and came to Shahnameh and became the national history of Iran . But the Naghsh-e Rostam embossment of Narseh is a different issue. The importance of this embossment is because that he is receiving the monarchy symbol from the goddess of Venus. This means that Narseh diplomatically had been able to dominate on the Istakhar fire temple again, and beside the power of Kartir he prays to the goddess . In early Sassanid period, the king used to define his successor, but later this task was left to the elders of the country and Zoroastrian Mobeds , after death of the king, a council charred by the Mobed of the Mobeds was responsible to choose the next king . Narseh next to the Venus may be a mention to political religious movement in Sassanid kingdom, perhaps this is a reaffirmation tradition of Narseh’s father and his grandfather as well. Exactly from this time onward Sassanid historical works are not visible in Pars, but instead they appear in north of the country. May be you can think Zoroastrian clerics became so powerful much more than limits, so the king decided not only round off them from their traditional bases, but made new places where new images could be seen there, it is not exactly clear what was the king’s motivation by this action or why he accepted new nicknames .The fact that Sassanid kings were nicknamed “ Kay “ and reinstatement of old Avestan names is enough reason for a new religious orientation which its center is at Shiz in Azerbaijan, So we can just say that Avesta is accepted as a holly book. About the imperial ideology a number of early Sassanid kings, meanwhile that considered themselves to be descended of the Gods, from force to the six century AD, by according Kianian ideology. This legacy was abandoned, but Khosrow second accepted both legacies .During the reign of Yazgerd (399-420AD) we faced a new ideology and behaviors with minorities, the word “Ramshahr” had been added on his coins (which it means establishing calm in the country), it was only the promotion from Zoroastrian clerics. He was nicknamed “ Kay” which was customary in Kianian ideology to expresses a tendency toward the Avestan-Kianian ideology, even before the prevalence of the terms “Kay” and “Khovareh” (Farahast)(...), in terms of ideology, Yazgerd second was the first one who used the nickname “Kay, Bagh, Mazda Parast”, it means that the Sassanid kings

at least in the territory where these coins were minted, they were not considered to be descendants of the goddesses, but they had been linked to the Avestan dynasty of Kianian, and this was the second appearance of Kianian ideology, after destroying the Azar Goshnasp fire temple by Heraclius (610-641 AD), once again Iran became alert and the fire temple was reconstructed and it was probably at that time when they surrounded the hill and fire temple by a thick and sturdy wall, at least until the third century AD, Azar Goshnasp was kept and was taken care of in a temple on the top of a hill. The return path of the fifth Bahram from the war against the Turks was from Azerbaijan. He dominated rubies and gems of the Khaghan's crown, plus a sword which was decorated by gems and jewelries and many other ornaments to the Azar Goshnasp in Shiz and sent Khaghan's wife "Khatoon" to the fire temple and made her to serve the temple. In Tabari's book it is that the fifth Bahram went to Azerbaijan before the war against the Turks. Tabari did not mention the battle field. Then Bahram went to Azerbaijan to his own place which was in Savad, and ordered that all the rubies, jewels and other gems from the Khaghan's crown be hung to the Azerbaijan fire temple.

We do not know how much Shapur second could limit the power of the elders and clerics. The only sign that could indicate the ability to impose Zoroastrian clergy on the monarchy is that Shapur second was one of the last kings who called himself "face of Yazdan". Perhaps the king finally became a non-religious ruler and his religious ceremonies had been reduced to a minimum. According to ancient Greek-Roman sources, Shapur second fought against the Romans in the west of the regions to recover the lands that belonged to his ancestors. It is unclear to us that who Shapur second considered his ancestors. But probably those sources mean that Achaemenid or Kianian were the ancestors of Shapur second. The following title was removed from the Sassanid coins since the kingdom of Shapur second gradually.

"Mazdisan Khodaygan".....the king of Iran, who has the face of the goddess.

From this period onwards we face an orientation to Kianian again which has been aligned with transforming the Zoroastrian into the official religion of the imperial, and their past has been linked to the Avestan Dynasty. At this time the Zoroastrian power was gained more than ever, therefore Shapur second was the last Sassanid king that claimed that he has the face of the goddess.

Conclusion

Istakhar is one of major cities from the appearance of the Sassanid kingdom and from the very beginning because it was birth place of Sassanid government founder, got a special attention to Zoroastrian religion. In Sassanid era. The religion and worldly power was in the hands of the kings. This goddess and the political powering show, was very rich in the first Sassanid period as it is in the inscriptions, we do not such inscriptions in second Sassanid period. We have bear in mind, there is not any inscription remained from almost half of the Sassanid kings. But from some period onward changes were formed in Avestan religion that we may have to consider the founder of this matter to be Kartir. He makes new schools, and create new religion and according to his claim he trains the true religion to the clerics, punishes the false clerics, he is strongly against heresy and opposes heroicists until Narseh , we see raising the Kartir power, but the heresy from Narseh by his own inscriptions, returns power to the kings of this family again. The role of the clerics like Kartir become dimmed as well. But clerics are trying to rebuild their own power and they support those kings and princes who are not interested in having religious authority, but on the coins and the nicknames given to them, they are called worshiper of Mazda and guardians of religion, and very quietly everything is transported to maad which is the magi's origin.

As many historians have said many myths have been created in this religious movement which has led to misguide and confusion in this. The important note is about Azar Barzin Mehr, the fire which is sacred for the Parthian, they prayed there and donated gifts, it was attributed to the lowest layer of the society in that time and they created a new fire and place for the upper classes of society. Several times Avesta was rewritten and some issues were added to it each time, and changes were made into it, and the original Avesta was burned by Alexandra, and now by this new Avesta, the Hole history of Zoroastrianism begins from Azerbaijan and Azar Goshnasp fire temple. We may have to accept that creation of a new religion has been the goal of the clerics which have changed all the subjects about Zoroastrianism, Zoroaster and his religion, and transformed it from the easternmost of Iran to the westernmost. A religion in which we see topics that differ from Zoroastrian beliefs and even prohibits is its followers from doing some of them, some topics which is also welcomed in Shiz.

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